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# The reforms had better be good

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IT IS so painful to watch the killing, the burning, the looting as black victims of apartheid fight Indian victims of racism in Durban and other parts of Natal Province in South Africa.

But I have seen this phenomenon before. After the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, outraged blacks who could not get at the FBI, the CIA and other parts of the white power structure vented their anger on Jewish merchants in their neighborhoods — Jews who in most cases were the best friends blacks and the civil rights movement had in white America.

Durban, 1985, and Washington, 1968, show us that a mob has many feet, hands and heads, but nary a brain.

No one with any perception

ought to be surprised by this woeful conflict between blacks and Asians. Last September, after the Botha regime offered insulting, meaningless roles in a three-tiered parliament to Asians and Coloreds (people of mixed race), but not even a sop to blacks, I wrote:

"The potential for violence has been multiplied by the new constitutional ploy in which the ruling white minority is trying to woo Asians and Coloreds to their side so as to isolate the black majority."

I noted in that column that Gatsha Buthelezi, the chief minister of KwaZulu, the so-called homeland of 5 million Zulus, and current darling of American conservatives because he opposes economic

sanctions, had said: "We feel betrayed because so many of our Colored and Indian brothers have rushed forward with their tongues hanging out to endorse this white rejection of us."

The white rulers in Pretoria and Cape Town cannot be very unhappy about this conflict.

Yet they cannot be pleased by that grotesque scene of a black soldier being burned to death by angry mourners at the funeral of Victoria Mxenge, the woman civil rights lawyer.

That burning body told Pretoria that it can't count on black soldiers, policemen, informers to suppress the restless natives the way they have in the past.

Meanwhile, in an effort to put the best face on his failed policy of "constructive engagement," President Reagan sent his national security adviser, Robert McFarlane, to Vienna for meetings with the South African foreign minister.

We are promised "significant reforms" by South Africa. But what reforms?

My wife and I went to South Africa in 1970 on a visit that was heralded on the front pages of newspapers there. Many South African newspapers printed my columns.

I reread those reports over the weekend and realized that, despite all the talk of "reforms" during the 15 intervening years, those columns could be printed tomorrow and still accurately reflect conditions in the land of apartheid.

The only changes are that a trifling bit of Jim Crow is missing, Asians and Coloreds have been suckered into a divide-and-keep-'em-conquered game, the government no longer is arresting blacks and whites for engaging in sex together — and, the black majority has lost its fear of prison, even death.

But overall conditions in South Africa in August 1985 are worse than when I was there in August 1970.

As the violence escalates to a point of no return, I can hardly wait to see what "reforms" the Botha regime will come up with in its desperate attempts to ease the hostility welling up toward it in just about every corner of the world except the Reagan White House.